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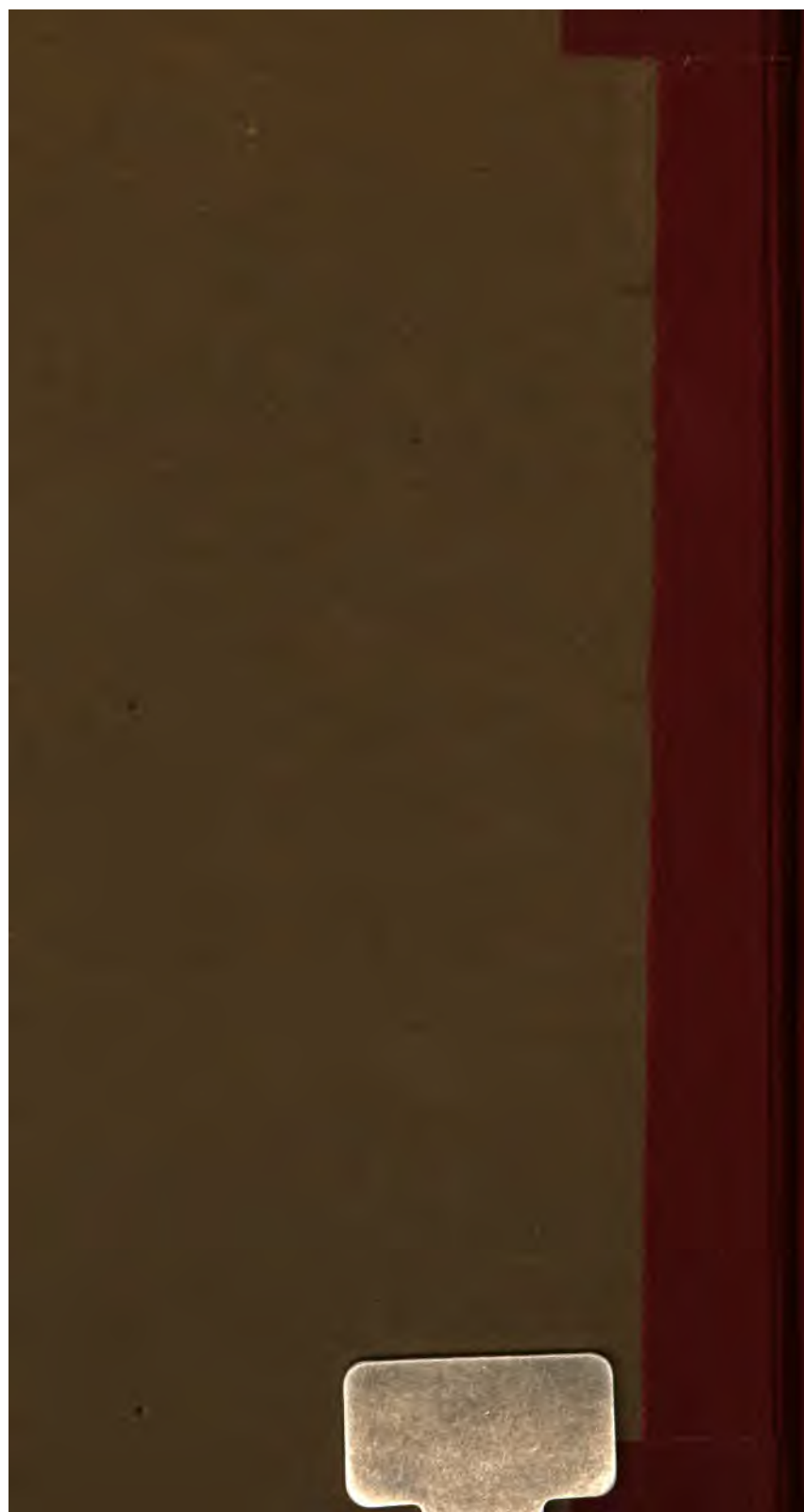
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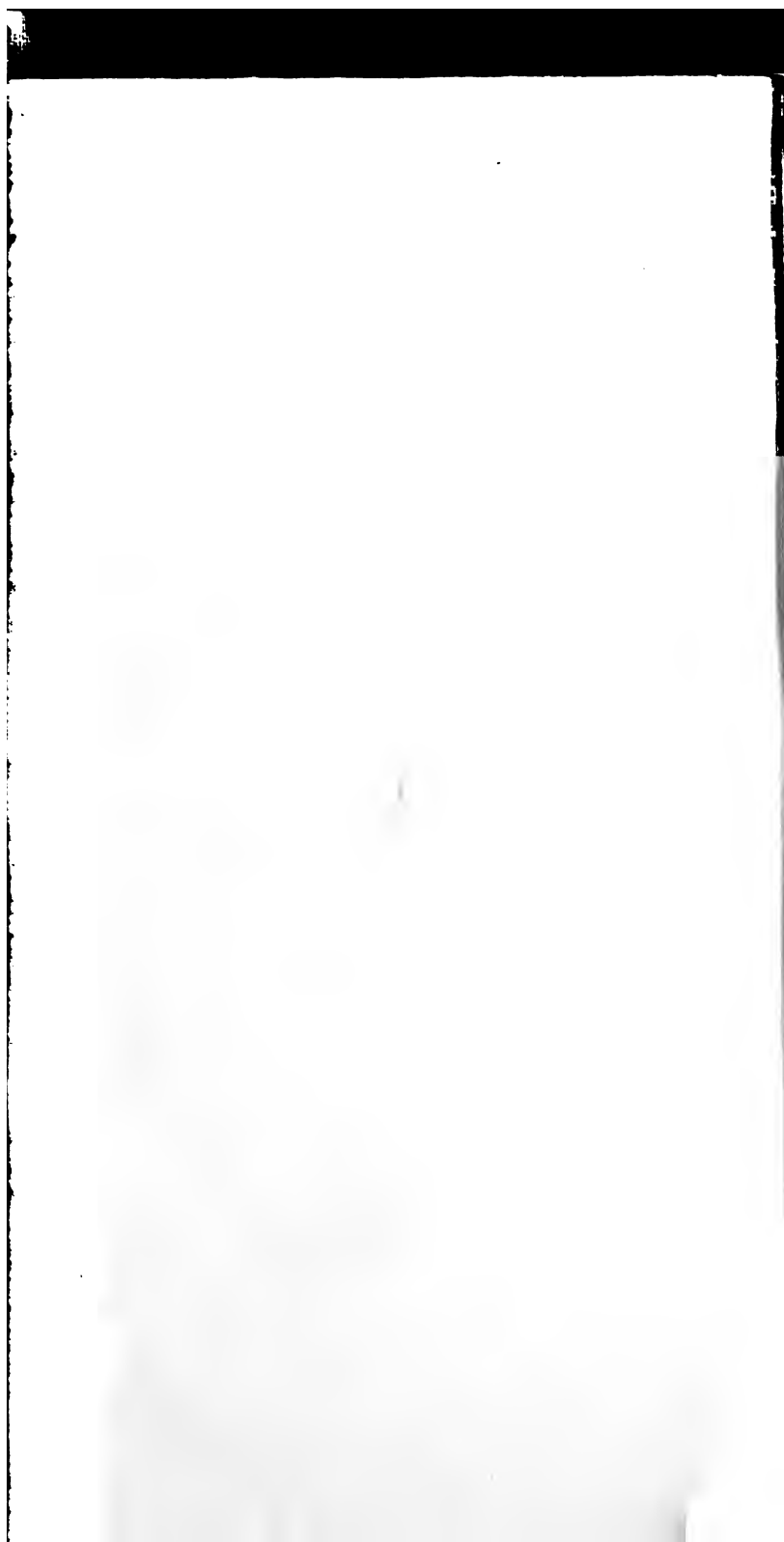
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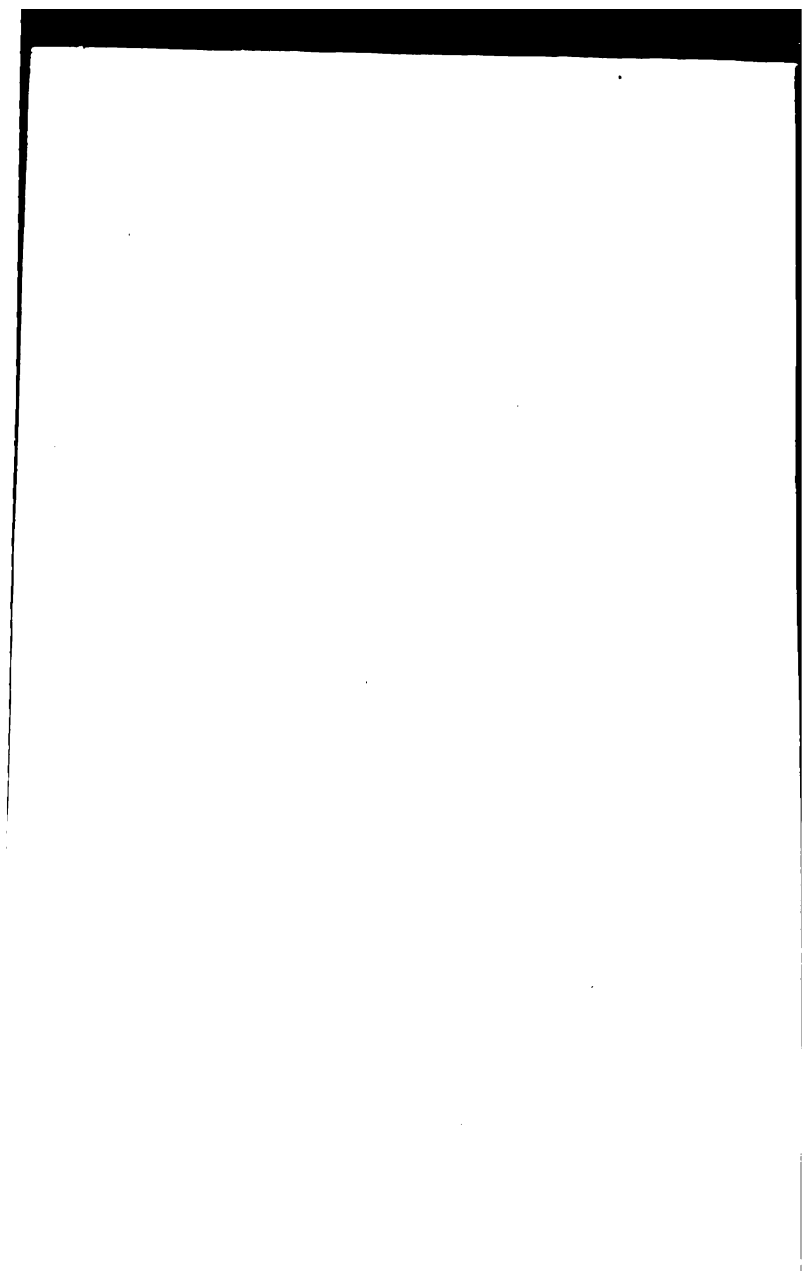
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A Sermon.

James Yates.







*Jeffers Jardene, with best resp  
from the Aus*

**The Grounds of Unitarian Dissent.**

A

**SERMON,**

PREACHED NOV. 15th, 1812,

**AT THE OPENING OF THE CHAPEL**

IN

**UNION-PLACE, GLASGOW.**

---

**By JAMES YATES, M. A.**

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*Licet veritati vel occultâ viâ tacitarum literarum ad aures vestras pervenire. Nihil de causâ suâ deprecatur, quia nec de conditione miratur. Scit se peregrinam in terris agere, inter extraneos facile inimicos invenire; ceterum, genus, sedem, spem, gratiam, dignitatem, in coelis habere. Unum gentis interdum, ne ignorata damnetur.*

TESTULLIANI APOLOGUSCUS.

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THE JOURNAL OF THE

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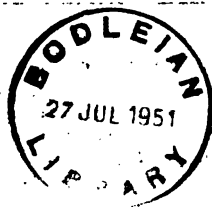
# ZOOLOGICAL

AND BOTANICAL

AND THE JOURNAL OF THE

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF

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27 JUL 1951

TO THE MEMBERS  
OF  
*The Unitarian Church in Glasgow,*

THE FOLLOWING

**DISCOURSE,**

SANCTIONED BY THEIR APPROBATION, AND

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS

**RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,**

BY THEIR FAITHFUL AND AFFECTIONATE PASTOR,

**JAMES YATES,**





## A SERMON, &c.

---

ACTS xxiv. 14.—*But this I confess unto thee,  
that, after the way which they call heresy,  
so worship I the God of my fathers,*

**TO** the charge, which the Apostle here acknowledges, and which has been preferred against so many of the wise and the good in all ages, we, my brethren, stand this day eminently obnoxious. Our distinguishing principles do not favour one sect of our fellow-citizens in opposition to another; but are inconsistent with doctrines, which are regarded by all of them as the vital and fundamental part of Christianity.

We know that the erection of this edifice is deplored by many, as tending to unsettle and disturb the minds of those, who have never considered the orthodox faith as a subject of dispute, and to lead some to abandon the belief on which they have reposed their hope of salvation. The invectives of those, who have nothing of Christianity but the name, we utterly disregard. But the mournful censure passed upon us by men, whose integrity we honour, and whose piety we are grieved to offend, although it cannot alter the nature of truth, nor induce us to relinquish principles embraced upon calm conviction, calls on us to inquire with humility and seriousness into the motives, by which we are influenced in separating ourselves from other churches, and appropriating this house to Unitarian worship. Are we certain, that we are not actuated by an obstinate spirit of opposition, or a vain desire of distinction?

Is this important transaction of our lives exempt from every feeling of pride and resentment, from every view to human applause and worldly advantage, from every aim to satisfy the discontent of a roving imagination, or to relax the strictness of moral discipline? Does our conscience answer, that we have embraced our opinions in consequence of unbiassed and attentive inquiry, that we ~~avote~~ ~~avote~~ them from an awful sense of duty? Are we desirous, while we secure our own everlasting welfare, to promote the happiness of mankind at large; to accelerate the diffusion of truth and virtue; and to advance the glory of God and the success and honour of the Christian cause? And, while we lament the errors of our Trinitarian brethren, and ardently long for the dawn of truth upon their minds, do we love and respect them for their virtues, praying for grace, mercy, and peace, to all of every sect, who love the Lord Jesus in

sincerity, and practise his commands? If these be our views and motives, happy are we! Though scoffers may deride and friends forsake, though enemies may injure and revile, and the strong arm of persecution be lifted up against us, God approves our righteous exertions; He will uphold us in the day of trial; He will finally bestow immortal bliss as our reward.

If, then, my brethren, we, like the Apostle Paul, are conscious that the singularity of our religious profession proceeds from pure, benevolent, and pious motives, we need not be ashamed to confess before our fellow-men, nor shall we be ashamed to confess, at the day of retribution, in the presence of our Judge, that after the way which some call *heresy*, we have worshipped the God of our fathers.

We owe it both to ourselves and to our friends and fellow-citizens, that, after having implored the divine blessing on the

services to be performed in this House of Prayer, we should occupy the first hours of our meeting together in it, in stating the *reasons*, which oblige us to separate from the Established Church, and from other bodies of Dissenters. Many regard our principles with the utmost abhorrence, consigning us and all who may be induced to join in our worship, to dreadful and everlasting woe: to such persons we would again urge our modest petition, that they would not condemn us *unheard*, nor violently reprobate a system which they have never taken the pains to understand; and we hope that a statement of our real sentiments may tend, if not to banish, at least to mitigate their asperity. Others think that our religious peculiarities are of such trifling import, as to make a separation unnecessary: to such persons we answer, that we dissent from the Establishment and from other sects, on points which we think of *supreme*

moment, the use of our Rational faculties, the Object of Religious worship, and the means of obtaining Salvation: by attending to our statement they will, we trust, perceive, that we are justified by the *great importance* of our principles in forming a distinct association, and that our opinions are powerfully conducive to private and domestic happiness, to civil peace and order, to the welfare of states, and to the moral and intellectual improvement of the whole human race. Others blame us for making an additional encroachment on the unanimity of Christian professors, and opening a fresh source of religious dissension: but upon consideration they will find, that our aim is directly the reverse, that our principles are admirably calculated to promote union among all the disciples of Jesus, to extinguish the flames of controversy, and at length to bring back all believers into one fold under one Shepherd.

If, in illustrating the nature and importance of our tenets, I shall be thought to treat other Christians injuriously, it will give me real concern. I wish to speak of them with correctness and impartiality, and to assert nothing but what is requisite to vindicate our separation. My stated hearers will bear me witness, that it is not my habit to utter invectives against other denominations, but that my great aim on all ordinary occasions is, to enlighten and edify their minds by presenting the most impressive views of the duties, the motives, and the hopes of Christians, and of the perfections and providence of the Sovereign Mind. Our secession from other churches evidently *implies*, that we think their principles in some respects defective: but, if this is *implied*, why should it not be openly acknowledged, and fairly stated? We listen with attention to the objections of our adversaries: why should *they* turn a disdainful



ear to the objections which we in the spirit of meekness propose to their consideration? Besides, if, faithful to what I deem important truth, I point out the defects of other Christian societies, I beg that it may be remembered, that I condemn only *principles and opinions*, not the *men*, in whom those principles and opinions, having been unhappily imbibed in the years of childhood, oppose the rising dictates of their understandings and the native benevolence of their hearts.

In order to convey a just idea of the constitution of Unitarian Societies, it is necessary to premise, that, whilst we are united by a few great principles, there are numerous topics of inferior consequence, respecting which we differ in opinion among ourselves. All Unitarians agree in denying that Jesus Christ was the eternal God, and that he is the object of religious worship. Some of them, however, believe that he was employed, as an instrument in the

hands of the Deity, to create the material world, though not possessed of underived wisdom and independent power: others believe only in his pre-existence. Some go still farther, maintaining that he was simply a human being, but conceived in the womb of the virgin according to the introductory chapters of Matthew and Luke's gospels: others see reason to believe that those chapters are interpolations, and therefore deny the doctrine of the miraculous conception\*. In like manner, all Unitarians agree, that the death of Christ was an incalculable blessing to mankind: some, however, do not presume to determine the exact *manner* in which it conduces to the good of men, while others think that the

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\* This extensive application of the term *Unitarian*, seems to be agreeable to its use among those of the continental Reformers, to whom it was originally given. It was employed as a *general* term, including various subordinate sects, viz. Farnovians, or Arians, Socinians, Budneans, and others. See Mosheim's Eccles. Hist. Cent. 16, Sec. 3, Part 2, Ch. 4, § 9, 22.

mode of its beneficial operation may be distinctly pointed out: but all reject the Trinitarian doctrines of satisfaction and vicarious atonement, believing, not that Jesus saves his followers from the everlasting misery to which they are supposed to have been doomed in consequence of the sin of their first parents, but that he saves them, by the force of his doctrines, precepts, and example, from vice, ignorance, and superstition, and from the misery which is their natural result. The ordinance of Baptism, which has generated so much bitter contention among Trinitarians, is a subject on which we entertain various opinions: some of us practise the baptism of *infants*, others of *adults*, and some think that this use of water may be omitted entirely\*.

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\* The Unitarian congregation of the New Meeting, Birmingham, presents the gratifying spectacle of two ministers, united in harmony and zeal, one of whom is a Baptist, the other a Pædo-baptist. See Dr. Toulmin's "Four Discourses on Christian Baptism," Dedication.

Concerning the question of an Intermediate State, and the philosophical doctrines of Materialism and Necessity, we either remain in doubt or espouse opposite sides. On these and other points, which have been debated by orthodox Christians with rancorous animosity, we agree to differ. We consider these subjects as important, and well worthy of an attentive examination; but we are convinced, that a difference of opinion respecting them, is no reason why we should not join together in adoring that God, whom alone we acknowledge, and in exhorting one another to those labours of love, and that patient continuance in well-doing, which alone we believe to be the conditions of our acceptance. By exercising mutual candour, and by the liberal and calm discussion of our opposite views, we hope, notwithstanding our variety of sentiment, to present an exemplary pattern of harmony and union.

What, then, are those great distinguishing principles, in maintaining which we are all agreed?

**I. The first is, THE FREE AND UNBIASSED USE OF THE UNDERSTANDING ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS.** This we regard as our undoubted right, our high prerogative, and our indispensable duty. To assert this, we quit the Church established by law, and the other sects of dissenters.

The principles of what is called Orthodoxy, are adverse to the free exercise of the understanding on religious subjects. According to this system, the mind of man is thoroughly depraved, and all its faculties perverted. Reason is a treacherous guide; always deceitful, but especially dangerous when followed in matters of faith. Is it possible, my friends, that they who entertain this degrading opinion of the faculty of reason, can "show themselves men,"

when religious truth is the object of pursuit?

The exercise of the understanding is also checked in the Trinitarian by the dread of that eternal misery, which he believes to be the consequence of error. Should he chance to abandon the true faith, the bottomless gulf of destruction yawns to receive him\*. Having such a prospect, how can he pursue his inquiries with his mind calm and composed, and fearlessly intent upon truth?

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\* Some, however, who retain the doctrine of the Trinity, deny that involuntary error exposes men to damnation. Here we see the struggle of Trinitarian prejudice with the natural feelings of humanity. But such a concession strikes at the root of the orthodox system, and is therefore regarded with horror by true Trinitarians. If any one admits that it is *possible* for a Unitarian to be a *good* man, to be the object of divine approbation, and to be happy after death, he is on the point of becoming a Unitarian himself. For his benevolent hope implies that he doubts or rejects the doctrine of original sin. But if original sin be given up, what necessity is there for the vicarious sufferings of an incarnate God, or the miraculous influence of the third person in the Trinity?

Besides this, many of the tenets of orthodoxy are acknowledged to be not only above reason, but apparently contrary to reason \*. Hence their advocates are reduced to the necessity of depreciating the human understanding, and making exceptions against its use. Either reason must be renounced, or Calvinism: through attachment to their early-received opinions, they commonly choose to renounce *reason*. Although the vigorous employment of it is attended with an exquisite gratification, they stigmatise it as *cold*; and, though it is the most *refined* and *spiritual* part of our nature, they call it *carnal*.

Thinking it unsafe to make faith the result of rational inquiry, the Trinitarian

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\* They are doctrines, in the language of a late eminent bishop, (Hurd,) "at which reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded;" and which, according to the expression of another bishop, (Beveridge,) "would be ridiculed as absurdities, if they were not to be adored as mysteries."



determines to ground it upon early prejudice. He is anxious, that the mysteries of religion should be among the first conceptions impressed upon the tender mind. Having with parental anxiety introduced his children to the *phraseology*, and, as far as the nature of the case admits, to the *ideas*, of the orthodox system, he only wishes that every future application of their minds to religious exercises may serve to confirm their belief in that system; and, with this ill-judged, but really benevolent intention, he cautions them against looking into any books, or listening to any conversation, by which their faith may be shaken. The orthodox *preacher* co-operates with these aims of the orthodox parent. Considering a firm belief in the doctrines of original sin, the atonement, and the divinity of Christ, as the only means of salvation, he labours incessantly to imprint those doctrines on the minds of his hearers: if he succeeds,



he secures to them eternal happiness and glory; if he fails, their everlasting and inconceivable torment is the consequence. Guided by these principles to his religious creed, the Trinitarian feels little curiosity to search after the *rational arguments*, which prove the divine origin of Christianity; he seldom elevates his thoughts by attending to the discoveries and reasonings of Natural Religion; and still less is he inclined to attend to the evidence advanced *against* the system, in which he has been educated.

To these principles and practices, (in stating which I have only studied fairness and impartiality,) how contrary are those which it is our happiness to maintain.

We are thankful to God for the faculty of reason, which we value as the choicest gift of the best and wisest of beings; imparted, not that it might deceive and betray us, but that we might enjoy that pure and elevated satisfaction, which accompanies

its active exertions; that it might guide us to the attainment of knowledge and virtue; that it might aid us in the direction of our social affections; and gradually advance our natures to their highest dignity and happiness. How great a blessing reason is, we are feelingly convinced, when we look upon those of our fellow-creatures, who want it; and of the exalted state of bliss and glory, to which man may attain by its diligent improvement, we form a faint conception by contemplating the vast acquisitions, to which it has already conducted. Reason has made the most wonderful and magnificent discoveries in physical science; it has weighed in a balance the distant planets, and brought to light the more secret operations of nature; and, while it has carried the mind from world to world and from system to system, it has made man almost an inhabitant of the heavens. Reason directs to whatever is true in specu-

lation, to whatever is excellent in practice. If men were always to judge *reasonably*, they would never admit any opinion as certainly true, but when it was supported by decisive evidence; and they would not allow their assent to be stronger, than was warranted in each case by the degree of probability: Reason would thus preserve them from *error*. If men were always to regulate their *conduct* by reason, they would see that whatever is contrary to the will of God and the invariable rules of rectitude, detracts from the happiness both of others and of themselves: Reason would thus preserve them from *vice*. No great amendment will ever be made in the condition of mankind, but by the use and improvement of reason. We therefore confer a most important benefit on our fellow-creatures, if we encourage them to the vigorous and unrestrained exercise of their understandings on every subject, and if, by inducing

them to reason *cautiously* and *frequently*, we teach them to reason *well*.

But among all subjects, by far the noblest and most important, on which we can employ our reason, is religion. We here expatiate in a field of boundless extent, where the imagination is elevated by being fixed upon the most grand and commanding objects, where the understanding is enlarged and strengthened by the most interesting and sublime inquiries, where the heart is trained to the admiration and pursuit of goodness, and immortal happiness discovered in the path of virtuous self-government. It is the office of Reason, (delightful and dignified employment!) to infer from the harmonious connection of the works of nature, from their infinite variety, and their stupendous magnitude, the existence of a Creator, great and wise and good. Reason then examines the *credentials*, by which Jesus and his Apostles prove their divine

commission. For the Christian religion, far from discouraging inquiry, asks a strict scrutiny and full investigation, in order that it may be acknowledged to be worthy of all acceptance. Jesus Christ requires us to use freely our senses and our intellects, to "hearken and to understand\*;" and his Apostles enjoin us to "prove all things;" "to be fully persuaded in our own minds;" "to be always ready to give an answer to every one, that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us†." Even when the claims of Christianity to a divine original have been admitted, reason is not to be laid aside. The diligent and careful use of it is still necessary, to enable us to discover the *sense* and *meaning* of the sacred writers. Unless we are guided by reason in studying them, the Scriptures can be of no more use to us,

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\* Mark vii. 14,

† 1 Thess. v. 21. Rom. xiv. 5. 1 Peter iii. 15. See also Acts xvii. 11. 1 Cor. x. 15. xiv. 20. Col. i. 9. 2 Tim. ii. 7.

than the light of day to the man who shuts his eyes. We therefore exercise our understanding in applying to the Volume of Revelation the rules of impartial and judicious criticism\*; we endeavour to discover

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\* The practice of Unitarians in this particular is alluded to with some severity in a passage of the late controversy, which took place in Glasgow, concerning the propriety of admitting instrumental music into public worship. To the remarks of an anonymous writer on the meaning of the word *ψαλμοι* in the Greek Testament, the Presbytery makes the following reply. "He seems not a little to countenance the method of translating and interpreting Scripture, adopted by Socinians and those who would be wise above what is written; arrogantly condemning the translation presently in use in our land, sanctioned by the King, and authorised by the Church." Statement of the Proceedings of the Presbytery of Glasgow relative to the use of an Organ in the public worship of God, p. 250. "It is *arrogant* then to propose amendments in the common translation, because it has been once received into general use, notwithstanding the numerous and important accessions to biblical knowledge since the year 1610, when it was first published; because it is "sanctioned by the King," notwithstanding the defects in it, which are rendered manifest by the learned and impartial labours of such men as Newcome, Marsh, Campbell, Griesbach, Michaelis, Schleusner; and because it is "authorised by the Church," although the Church, (in our humble opinion unreasonably,) bows to Royal authority in questions of sacred criticism, and thus annihilates the independent weight even of her own decision.

its real doctrines by comparing one portion with another, by using the plainer parts as aids in interpreting the more obscure, and by considering the circumstances in which the writers were placed, and the modes of speaking to which they were accustomed.

As friends to the unrestrained and unbiassed use of the mental faculties in themselves and others, Unitarians are the decided foes of persecution in every form and degree; and not only do they dissent on this ground from the established Churches of England and Scotland, but would disapprove of a civil establishment, even though expressly framed for the support of their own doctrines. When the governors of a country undertake to avow and maintain a certain theological system, and expose those, who do not receive it, to pains, penalties, and privations, they necessarily produce in the minds of men an undue bias towards that particular system, which is

unfavourable to the free exercise of the understanding in the pursuit of truth. Religious establishments are also objectionable, because they induce the most profane and worthless men to assume a religious profession merely to gratify their views of interest and ambition, and thus bring reproach upon the cause of Christianity; because true religion wants not their assistance, and prefers to engage the respect of men solely by the evidences of its truth and the happy effects of its diffusion; because the exclusive support of a certain theological system is a misapplication of the public revenues; and because the civil magistrate is in general so little qualified to be the arbiter of religious controversies, that, if he interferes at all, he is much more likely to establish *error*, than to patronise *truth*. A religious establishment appears to be an insult both to the human understanding, and to the Christian religion:



it insults the human understanding by implying, that it requires to be directed and overawed by the great and the powerful, even in those concerns, with regard to which all are equal in the eye of God; and all equally capable of forming a just decision; it insults the Christian religion by implying, that its own truth and excellence is not a sufficient bulwark, and that it can produce no good effects without the aid and protection of the civil power\*. If we

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\* "Some gentlemen talk of 'raising barriers about the Church of God, and protecting his honour.' Language that is astonishing, that is shocking, that almost approaches to blasphemy. What! Man! a poor vile contemptible reptile, talk of raising barriers about the Church of God! He might as well talk of protecting Omnipotence, and raising barriers about his throne. Barriers about the Church of God, Sir! About that church, which, if there be any veracity in Scripture, shall continue for ever, and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail? If I may be allowed on so serious an occasion to recollect a fable, it puts me in mind of one which I have met with, of a stately, magnificent, impregnable castle built on a rock, the basis of which was the centre of the earth, the top of it pierced the clouds, the thickness of the walls could not be measured by cubits. At the bottom of it a few

endeavour to decide the question concerning the utility of establishments by an appeal to *experience*, we find that Christianity flourished most, and produced by far the most glorious and happy effects, during the period when it received no countenance whatever from any civil authority\*; that

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moles were one day very busy in raising up a little quantity of earth, which when some mice saw, What are you doing, said they, to disturb the tranquillity of the lord of this castle? We are not disturbing his tranquillity, replied the moles; *all blind as you are*, you may see that we are only throwing up a rampart to protect his castle.

“The Church of God, Sir, can protect itself. Truth needs not be afraid of not obtaining the victory on a fair trial. The lovers of truth will love all sincere inquirers after it, though they may differ from them in various religious sentiments. For it is to impartial and free inquiry only that error owes its ruin and truth its success. Those who are penetrated with the benevolent spirit of the Gospel will not condemn as heretics, will not reject as unworthy of their affection, any who believe the Christian religion, who search and endeavour to understand the Scriptures, though they may be unable to comply with creeds and articles.”—Sir George Savile’s Speech in the House of Commons, Feb. 6th, 1772, published (p. 57.) in Mr. Belsham’s *Life of Lindsey*, a most interesting and important Work.

\* That is, from the time of its first promulgation to the year 313, when Constantine the Great professed Christianity.

nearly all state religions, whether Christian or Pagan, have been supported by the most unprincipled persecutions, serving as the obsequious tools of Tyranny, and the main supports of ignorance and fraud; and that, although the religious establishments of Christendom now wear a more mild and rational aspect, chiefly through the influence of men without their pale, they still present obstacles to the progress of knowledge and the improvement of mankind, almost sufficient to quench the hopes of philanthropy.

But, allowing that the magistrate might justly apply the public revenue to the maintenance of Christian worship, as a useful method of preventing crimes against society, surely unintelligible mysteries and numerous points of controversy are not the proper tests of admission. A few plain, practical, and undisputed truths ought to be selected, such as the being of a God, the

divine mission of Jesus Christ, and a future state of rewards and punishments; and all, who profess these fundamental doctrines, ought to be permitted to come in. But how different from this is the constitution of our established Churches! It has been calculated by Dr. Paley\*, that the Articles of the Church of England, to which he belonged, contain *two hundred and forty* distinct propositions, many of them inconsistent with one another; and I presume, that the distinct propositions, contained in the Westminster Confession, which is the standard of faith adopted by the members of the Church of Scotland, would be found upon examination to be neither less numerous, nor less inconsistent. Although therefore, for the sake of conciliation, we were willing to enter a National Church, erected on a broad and liberal basis, we

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\* See the Appendix to Meadley's excellent Life of Paley, Second Edition, p. 372.

must still dissent from those now existing, both of which are formed on the most contracted principles of *exclusion*.

Shut out from the Established Church, may we look for the opportunities of greater freedom in speech and reasoning among the various classes of our dissenting brethren? Alas! while we are ready to rejoice, that they nobly emancipate themselves from the yoke of the civil government, we regret, that, through the influence of their theological system, they endure from their own ministers, and even encourage among themselves, a degree of inquisitorial strictness and spiritual domination, inconsistent with that unrestrained and manly exercise of the understanding for which we contend, and subversive of that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free\*.

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\*I have however much pleasure in thinking, that our brethren, the Independents and the Baptists, have in this part of the Island done much during the last 15 years towards promoting a spirit of inquiry and a desire of religious knowledge.

On the same ground therefore, on which the magnanimous band of Reformers abjured the thralldom of Popery\*, we quit the communion of Orthodox Churches. On this spot we seek an asylum, where we may freely and vigorously employ our intellectual powers in the most interesting and sublime investigations. This temple we have raised to REASON, to FREE INQUIRY, to INDIVIDUAL JUDGMENT!

II. Another great and distinguishing principle, which we here assemble to maintain, is that we OUGHT TO OFFER PRAYER AND ADORATION TO GOD, THE FATHER, ONLY.

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\* See Keptish's Sermon on the Connection of Unitarianism with the Leading Principles of the Protestant Cause. Also Hess's very interesting "Life of Zuingli, translated by Miss Aikin," in which the close resemblance between the principles of inquiry, acted upon by that great reformer, and those now pursued by Unitarians, is very striking.

In the churches of orthodox Christians, religious worship is addressed not only to God, the Father, but to two other persons, minds, or intelligent beings, each possessed of all divine attributes; that is, we conceive, to two other Gods. We do not blame our brethren, who seriously believe that these three persons equally claim their homage, for acting consistently with their principles. But, since to *us* there is one God, the Father; since *we* think the doctrine of the Trinity alike contrary to reason and to Scripture; since we believe that Jesus Christ is always represented in the New Testament as a created and dependant being, and deny the personality of the Holy Ghost, we cannot conscientiously join in Trinitarian worship; in *us* the habitual adoration of these false deities would be sinful and impious; we dread to disobey that often repeated mandate, "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and him only

shalt thou serve." We regard the duty of public prayer to God as most solemn and indispensable. We cannot cease to "love the habitation of his house, and the place where his honour dwelleth." But we cannot join in the devotions either of the Establishment, or of any other sect, because they are addressed to improper objects. We are constrained, therefore, to meet as a distinct society for this awful purpose.

We know that many, who admit our opinions, nevertheless attend the religious services of Trinitarians; nor do we condemn them; to their own Master let them stand or fall. To *us*, however, the path of duty is clear, the voice of conscience and of heaven is authoritative and irresistible. In our eyes, the great doctrine of the Unity of God shines with incomparable lustre throughout the Bible, and we find no precept in the divine law so solemnly and forcibly enjoined as that, which requires us



to confine our homage to the One Supreme and Uncreated Jehovah.

To reveal, establish, and propagate this doctrine, was the great end proposed to be accomplished by the inspiration of the Hebrew prophets, and the splendid series of miracles recorded in the Old Testament. To promulgate the same truth among heathen nations, and ultimately to effect its universal reception in the world, appears to have been one of the chief purposes, which God designed to answer by the mission of his well-beloved Son. The divine being himself, therefore, has borne testimony to its great importance, and has taught us with what a holy and watchful jealousy it ought to be guarded. When this doctrine is strictly maintained, when all the events of life and all the appearances of nature are ascribed to the unerring wisdom and the boundless benevolence of the one almighty, unchangeable, and everlasting God, a firm

foundation is laid for the most exalted piety. But when this great truth is once abandoned, when calamities are referred to the interference of malevolent agents, and the condition of man is supposed to be affected by the will of beings, who act independantly of the one true God, a door is opened for the admission of every folly, and the most gross idolatry, the most gloomy superstition may be expected to ensue. Kind and compassionate deities will be regarded with gratitude perhaps, but not with confidence and veneration; the idea of malevolent powers influencing the state of man will raise the dismal feelings of abhorrence, anxiety, and terror\*; whilst the affections

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\* The learned Dr. Thomas Burnet, in his *Archæologie Philosophicæ*, (a work which I admire much for its beautiful style and elegant Latinity,) maintains that the creation and fall of man took place on the same day, and thus bitterly laments, that what God employed six days in completing, the Devil destroyed in as many hours. “*Intra unius diei spatium hæc omnia confecta legimus, magna et multifaria negotia. Sed ardeo dolore, cum, tantillo tempore, omnia inversa et perturbata*

of *supreme* love and reverence, which admit not of division, and can only centre on *one* object, will be entirely annihilated. Do I speak from mere speculation? Read the history of mankind; you will then perceive it to be a fact, that in proportion as the Unity of God has been disregarded either by Heathens, Israelites, or Christians, these evils have been the uniform and dreadful consequence.

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video; totamque rerum naturam, vix dum compositam et adornatam, ante primi solis occasum ad interitum ruere et deformari. Mane diei Deus dixit, omnia esse bona; sub vespere omnia sunt execrabilia. Quam fluxa est rerum creaturarum gloria! Opus elaboratum per sex dies, idque omnipotenti manu, infamis Bestia totidem horis perdidit. Lib. II. cap. 7.

Thus is the Devil advanced to a higher rank than the true God. And, although the Devil himself never did any harm, (since he has no existence but in the *ardent* imagination of erring Christians,) yet the *idea* of him has done infinite mischief. It has caused the cruel murder of thousands, who were suspected of intercourse with him, and the distressful terror and miserable superstition of millions, who believed in his existence. As nothing produces such elevation of mind and dignity of character as true religion, so nothing leads to such degrading follies and horrible excesses of cruelty as false notions of superior agency.

As therefore we value the happiness of mankind, the honour of religion, and the improvement and welfare of our own souls; we are bound to obey the earnest warnings of the Almighty against Polytheism, exhibited both in his Holy Word and in the course of his providence; and to come out from those, who pay religious worship not to God, the Father, only; but to other beings, characterised by different dispositions and offices, called God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Whether, my brethren, we regard the blessed Jesus with those sentiments of love and veneration, which are due to one of his perfect character and exalted office, it becomes not us to say. . . But we may affirm that, on account of the unblemished purity of his life and the elevated principles by which he was always actuated, his high dignity as the chief of the prophets of God, and the incalculable benefits which, through

his voluntary sufferings and his unshaken fidelity and zeal, have been conferred upon mankind, we are persuaded that his true disciples will honour him more than every other creature. But we wish to evince our gratitude and reverence, not by addressing to him praises and prayers, which he would reject and disapprove; but by worshipping in spirit and in truth that being, whom he also worshipped as "his Father and our Father, his God and our God," and by being influenced by the motives and hopes, which are set before us in his impressive warning, "Not every one, that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that *doeth the will* of my Father who is in Heaven."

This house of prayer we therefore dedicate to the ONE TRUE GOD, the Father of all, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. A third grand principle, on account of which we separate from the Established Church and other bodies of Dissenters, is that WE REGARD HOLINESS OF HEART AND EXCELLENCE OF CONDUCT, AS THE ONLY MEANS OF OBTAINING SALVATION.

Our orthodox brethren, in their religious exercises, perpetually aim to impress the conviction, that we are by nature vile and depraved, prone only to wickedness, and therefore "subject to God's wrath and curse, and liable to the pains of hell for ever." They further teach us, that the second person of the Trinity, moved with compassion for our devoted race, agreed to satisfy the wrath \*

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\* I believe Calvinists would now object to the word "wrath," and say that the Atonement of Christ satisfied, not the wrath, but the *justice* of God. But *that* punishment is directly contrary to justice, which is neither inflicted for the purpose of reforming the offender, nor even upon the person, who committed the crime. To say therefore that *justice* was satisfied by the sufferings and death of Christ, is a mere misapplication of the word, which does not alter the nature of the doctrine. For this reason I retain the old and proper word, *wrath*.

of the first person, by taking upon him our nature, and enduring in our stead the misery, to which we were doomed. On his vicarious atonement we are exhorted to rely, as the only method of salvation; repentance and reformation of manners are said to be of no avail; the works of charity and piety are depreciated\*, and a dependance on them is represented as presumptuous and fatal.

To us this system appears to be inconsistent, not only with reason and with itself, but with the plainest lessons of the Scriptures: and, as we dare not lean upon this broken reed, but entertain other views of the placability of our heavenly Father and the conditions of acceptance, we come here to offer a contrite heart as a sacrifice which

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\* To the universal application of this statement, I rejoice to think that our brethren, the Wesleyan Methodists, are an exception. Their strain of preaching is generally *practical*, and, though mingled with much error, well adapted to reform the morals of the lower classes.

God will not despise, to confide in his gracious promises of pardon upon repentance and newness of life, and to learn the whole extent of the duties, which he requires and will finally reward and honour.

We are far from believing, (as our opponents wrongfully assert,) that our imperfect deeds of benevolence and piety *entitle* us to the rewards of heaven. *Our* sentiments on this subject are those expressed by the apostle Paul: “By *grace* are ye saved, through faith; and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast\*.” However pure and perfect we become, we are still unprofitable servants; we have only done our duty; we in general receive an abundant recompense in *this* life. The happiness promised beyond the grave is not *due* to our deserts, but flows from the inexhaustible fountain of divine

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\* Eph. ii. 8, 9.



goodness. It is neither obtained by the merits of Christ, nor by *our own merits*, but is the *free* and *unpurchased* gift of infinite love.

Such is the admirable efficacy of the precepts of the New Testament, as to diminish and often entirely subdue, in those who study its pages, the malignant influence of the Calvinistic creed; so that, through the power of gospel morality, aided by virtuous education, the force of good examples, and natural benevolence of disposition, the societies of our orthodox brethren contain numerous individuals, on whose excellence of character we gladly bestow our highest approbation. Still we have reason to believe, that they would be more happy and cheerful, and more kind, liberal, and candid, if they entertained opinions less derogatory from the dignity of man and the goodness of God. The Calvinistic faith, however it may be counteracted by better prin-

ciples, is in itself pernicious, gloomy, and immoral.

They, who believe that the dispositions and faculties of their innocent infant are from its birth perverted, can be expected to take but little pleasure and employ but feeble efforts in the almost hopeless task of training it to wisdom and to virtue. These views of human nature tend also to suppress the desires of improvement and the generous sentiments of emulation. If a man is firmly persuaded that he is by nature irresistibly inclined to vice, he will hardly dare to aspire at elevated goodness, and is in some danger of becoming in reality the vile and worthless wretch, which he had falsely conceived himself to be. But if he is impressed with just views of the high rank, which he holds in the scale of creation, and of the still sublimer heights of virtue, to which, by the proper use of his intellectual and moral faculties, he is capable of

attaining; whilst he rejoices in the dignity of his nature, and is sincerely grateful to the author of his exalted capacities, he will endeavour to act in a manner worthy of one so highly favoured, to complete the work which God has begun, and to reach the pinnacle of excellence and glory, which he knows is not beyond his powers.

The doctrine of atonement is unfavourable to moral improvement, not only because it ascribes a conduct to God which we should detest in man, but because it represents virtuous habits and dispositions, as attainments of very subordinate importance. If a man thinks, that he secures everlasting happiness by embracing a particular creed, he is disposed to act upon the principle, that his great and only business is to *believe*, without feeling much solicitude about his practice. The Bible indeed plainly teaches, that God will reward every man according to his *works*, and not according

*th.* Hence all, who are able to  
Scriptures, and make a proper use  
estimable privilege, learn to pre-  
leath and heaven, not so much by  
orthodox doctrines, as by endea-  
to make all their thoughts, words,  
is, agreeable to the revealed will

It is probable however that,  
and the authority of the Scrip-  
c. notion that the happiness of  
heaven is secured by the mere belief of  
certain mysterious doctrines, produces a  
very considerable and a very bad effect.

The ideas of salvation by faith in the  
atonement of Christ, of everlasting woe as  
the consequence even of involuntary error,  
and of the misery to which the great bulk  
of mankind are conceived to be still irre-  
versibly devoted, tend to overwhelm the  
mind with superstitious dread and melan-  
choly, and to destroy the placid confidence  
of true devotion. They also form a barrier

against inquiry\*, and cherish the sentiments of bigotry and aversion towards those, who are believed to be the objects of the divine vengeance, the obstinate adherents to natural corruption, and the heirs of eternal damnation. To this source we may trace most of the *persecutions*, which have disgraced the Christian name. They were intended to save the souls of men, by the shedding of their blood and the barbarous laceration of their bodies.

Although we, as Unitarians, are destitute of that powerful engine of conversion, by which our opponents have put to silence the reason, and worked upon the weakness of men, so as to bring over numbers to the

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\* When James V. of Scotland, received from his uncle Henry VIII. a present of some books in confutation of Popery, he, threw them into the fire in the presence of the person who brought them, observing that "it was better *he* should destroy *them*, than *they* *him*." (Hume's History, Henry VIII. ch. 2.) When Calvinists in the present day receive Unitarian publications, they are sometimes known to argue in the same manner, and condemn the books to the same fate.

orthodox faith; yet we esteem it not a disadvantage, but a distinguishing ornament and glory, that our system requires nothing of its professors, but to be kind, devout, and blameless, and to aim at the best possible improvement of their talents and capacities; that it leads them to be solicitous about nothing else, so much as their advancement in *virtue*; and teaches them, that, however a brother may err in speculation, yet, if his *practice* be good, if his charity be warm, his piety unaffected, and his integrity unshaken, he deserves to be commended, loved, and honoured. The awful doctrine, which this system places steadily before our eyes during our passage through life, is, that "God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness," and that every individual of the human race, according to the deeds done in the body, whether good or evil, will be rewarded with abundant and ever

lasting happiness, or doomed to severe and long-enduring chastisement. This is a great practical truth, than which none can be more powerfully adapted to elevate and purify the mind. Happiness and misery are placed before us; to learn by what CONDUCT we may secure the one and escape the other, is the solemn business on which we here assemble.

If I have fairly delineated the characteristic features of Unitarianism, I leave it to the candid to decide, whether we are not justified by their supreme importance in abandoning the worship of orthodox societies. We trust that pride and vanity are not the motives of our secession, but an imperious sense of what we owe to God and to ourselves; and we hope that, instead of promoting discord and animosity among Christians, we pursue the most effectual method of producing unanimity and peace.

We are urged to this avowal of our principles by a regard, not only to our own duty, but to the general improvement and happiness of mankind. Unitarianism not only unfolds the sublimest lessons of wisdom and virtue to those who embrace it; but it appears to be the sole check to infidelity, and the only method of leading Jews, Mohammedans, and Heathens, to receive the Christian religion. The objections of unbelievers to the truth of Revelation have for the most part applied only to the false additions, which have been made to it. The whole body of the Jews and Mohammedans insist so strongly on the doctrine of the unity of God, that they will undoubtedly continue to hold Christians in abhorrence, as long as they persevere in Trinitarian worship. When attempts have been made to propagate Christianity among Pagan nations, the doctrine of the Trinity has often been found to be an invincible obstruction,



The untutored Indian has overcome in arguing upon it the enlightened European, and has decided upon continuing to worship his painted idols of wood and stone, instead of the other false gods, whom the Christian has proposed to substitute in their place.

We applaud the courageous and disinterested zeal of our Trinitarian brethren, who have visited the most distant regions of the globe, to promulgate doctrines, which they, though erroneously, conceived to be important truths. The more delightful views, which we entertain on religious subjects, and the more powerful motives, which are placed before us, to prompt to the execution of every benevolent and generous design, should make us no less desirous to lead others to a serious investigation of the truth, and to display the religion we profess in its native beauty and dignified simplicity. We need not travel into remote countries for the purpose of extending the

knowledge of Christ; because, alas! in our own beloved country doctrines are still maintained, as opposite to the pure religion of Jesus as those which we should discover in distant parts. Our aim should be to correct the faith of those, who already acknowledge the divine authority of Christ, and who profess a willingness to try their doctrines by the touch-stone of the Scriptures. If we shall succeed in establishing the undiluted Gospel here on a broad and solid foundation, we need not doubt that the most extensive benefits will ensue to the other portions of the globe. The obstacles which have hitherto rendered it almost impossible to extend Christianity by appeals to the *reason* and *conscience* of men, will then be removed; and our posterity will see it received with gratitude and exultation in every land, disarming at once the terrors of superstition and the allurements of vice.

We indulge the pleasing expectation\*, that a state of the world will at some period arrive, in which "men shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks;" in which the din of battle will be no longer heard; and all mankind will be united in the bonds of amity and mutual good will. But this can only be accomplished in one single way; by the extensive prevalence of the doctrines which we maintain, the benevolent and sanctifying doctrines of the *uncorrupted* Gospel. The wisdom of politicians and the lessons of philosophers appear incompetent to bring on this enviable condition of things; and scarcely is the Trinitarian system found to have a greater efficacy in promoting a general amendment in the manners and dispositions of mankind. It has now been

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\* See Dr. Price's admirable Sermon on "the Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind."

maintained in Europe for the space of fifteen hundred years, and, during this long trial of its usefulness, men have still continued to hate, murder, and persecute one another, and to neglect the duties of piety, benevolence, and temperance. The reason of this has probably been, that, while it has placed an irksome and degrading restraint on the intellectual powers, the divine authority and distinguished excellence of the gospel *morality*, the bright and spotless *example* of Christ, and the awful prospect of *righteous retribution*, have been almost hidden from the view by the false and worthless inventions, which have been insisted on as of equal or much greater importance. By restoring the Christian faith to its original purity, we may expect that it will be made to produce on the minds of its professors its genuine effects, and that Christians will once more be distinguished by all those moral graces, which adorned the charac-

ters of its humble advocates, before it was deteriorated by the admixtures of human presumption.

Yes! beloved brethren! I trust that, while we separate ourselves from the majority of our countrymen; while we assemble apart to "worship the God of our Fathers;" while we search the Scriptures daily, making them the guides of our faith, and endeavour to awaken the attention of others to the truth and importance of our principles; we are using the best method of accelerating the approach of that happy æra, when vice and superstition will no longer degrade the dignity and pollute the innocent pleasures of man; when ambition will cease to erect her blood-stained trophies, and avarice to amass her sordid spoils; when the iron rod of tyranny, which before swayed the world, will be exchanged for the mild and salutary laws of the Gospel of Peace; when all the nations

of the earth, having no jealousy but the emulation of generous deeds, will not seek one another's destruction, neither learn war any more.

We extend our views to yet happier and more exalted scenes. We are carried forward to the day, when the voice of him, who "was dead and liveth for evermore," shall re-animate our sleeping dust, and our glorified bodies draw fresh beauty from the wreck of worlds. The time is coming, when of this temple, in the completion of which we now rejoice together, not one stone shall be left upon another. All the works of human skill are no sooner formed than they begin to decay. The magnificent temples of Greece and Rome are now known only by their ruins; "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen;" and the hallowed sanctuary on Mount Zion is no more. States and empires are dissolved, and the earth is waxing old.

"The stars shall fade away, the sun himself

"Grow dim with age, and nature sink in years."

We are travelling to the silent land, which is peopled with our fathers, our kindred, and our friends. But an everlasting glory surrounds these perishable walls, if they, who have here trained their minds to the obedience and love of God, shall be judged worthy to join the adoring throngs of Angels, Martyrs, Patriarchs, and Saints, with them to range unconfined through the Temple of the Universe; enjoying the most fair and extensive views of the Divine works; looking back with exultation to the sorrows, the trials, and temptations over which they are triumphant; seeing God as he is, and advancing perpetually in his likeness; employing their enlarged powers in the promotion of good; and reaping those sublime and endless satisfactions, which eye hath not seen; nor ear heard, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. To obtain this blissful rank is our wisest and most glorious aim: Let it

be our unwearied study, our daily prayer,  
our fervent aspiration.

Now to the King, Eternal, Immortal,  
Invisible, THE ONLY GOD, be ascribed ho-  
nour and glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*



## TO THE READER.

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As the preceding Discourse contains nothing more than a brief statement of the distinguishing opinions of Unitarians and the grounds of their dissent, I cannot expect that it will *convince* any one. I however indulge the hope, that, through the blessing of God and the force of undisguised majestic truth, it will dispose some serious and candid Readers to attend to the arguments by which Unitarianism is supported. For the satisfaction of such persons, I subjoin a list of *Publications*, which appear to me to supply the best defence of Unitarian principles, only observing that an impartial comparison of the evidence, produced both *for* and *against* those principles, is all that their advocates ask or wish.



## ***List of Unitarian Publications.***

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By JOHN LOCKE.

**The Reasonableness of Christianity, as delivered in the Scriptures.**

By WILLIAM PENN.

**The Sandy Foundation Shaken; or, those so generally believed and applauded doctrines of one God subsisting in three distinct and separate persons, of the impossibility of God's pardoning sinners without a plenary satisfaction, &c. refuted from the authority of Scripture testimonies and right reason.—1s.**

By THOMAS EMLYN.

**A Collection of Tracts, relating to the Deity, Worship, and Satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

By DANIEL WHITBY, D. D.

**Last Thoughts concerning the Trinity.**

By ISAAC WATTS, D. D.

**A Solemn Address to the Deity.**

By JOHN TAYLOR, D. D.

**The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin proposed to free and candid Examination.**

**The Scripture Doctrine of Atonement examined.**

**A Key to the Apostolic Writings, or an essay to explain the gospel scheme, and the principal words and phrases the Apostles have used in describing it.—(Prefixed to Taylor on the Romans.)**

By NATHANIEL LARDNER, D. D.

**A Letter on the Logos, with two Postscripts concerning the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, &c.—1s.**

By RICHARD PRICE, D. D. F. R. S. &c.

**Sermons on Christian Doctrine.**

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL. D. F. R. S. &c. &c.

An Appeal to the Professors of Christianity, on the use of Reason in matters of Religion, the Power of Man to do the Will of God, the Divinity of Christ, &c.—6d.

The Trial of Mr. Elwall for Heresy.—1d.

A familiar Illustration of certain Passages of Scripture.—4d.

A History of the Corruptions of Christianity, 2 vol. 8vo. (See also the whole of the Controversy with Bishop Horsley.)

A History of Early Opinions concerning Christ, proving that the Church was at first Unitarian, 4 vol. 8vo. (Answered by Dr. Jamieson of Edinburgh.)

By GILBERT WAKEFIELD, B. A.

An Inquiry into the Opinions of the Christian Writers of the three first centuries, concerning the Person of Christ.

By THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M. A.

An Apology for resigning the Vicarage of Catterick; and the Sequel to the Apology.—2s. 6d. (Answered by Dr. Burgh, Mr. Bingham, and Dr. Randolph.)

Conversations on Christian Idolatry.—2s.

Conversations on the Divine Government, showing that every thing is from God and for good to all.—1s. 6d.

By JOHN DISNEY, D. D. F. A. S.

An Apology for resigning the Rectory of Panton, &c.

By THOMAS BELSHAM.

The Importance of Truth and the Duty of making an open profession of it, a Sermon.

Freedom of Inquiry and Zeal in the diffusion of Christian Truth, asserted and recommended: a Discourse delivered at Bristol, before a Society for promoting Christian knowledge and the practice of virtue by the distribution of books.

A Calm Inquiry into the Scripture Doctrine concerning the Person of Christ.—14s.

A Review of Mr. Wilberforce's Treatise.

By JOSHUA TOULMIN, D. D.

The Lives of John Biddle, M. A. and Thomas Firmin.—2s. 6d.

A Sermon on the Scripture term Mystery.—4d.

A Review of the Preaching of the Apostles; or the Practical Efficacy of the Unitarian Doctrine, proved and illustrated from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus.—1s.

A Dialogue between a Dutch Protestant and a Franciscan Friar.—6d.

By LANT CARPENTER, LL. D.

The Importance of the Doctrine of the Proper Unity of God.—1s.

Errors respecting Unitarianism considered.—1s. 6d.

Discourses on the Genuineness, Integrity, and Public Version of the New Testament, with a list of the principal departures of Griesbach's Text from the received Text.—1s. 6d.

Unitarianism the Doctrine of the Gospel; a view of the scriptural grounds of Unitarianism, with an examination of all the expressions in the New Testament, which are generally considered as supporting opposite doctrines.—6s.

By T. COGAN, M. D.

Letters on Hereditary Depravity, addressed to Mr. Wilberforce.—1s. 6d.

By WILLIAM FRENCH, M. A.

An Address to Trinitarians, exhorting them to turn from the false worship of three persons to the worship of the one true God.—2d.

By **RICHARD WRIGHT.**

**An Essay on the Unity and Supremacy of the one God and Father, and the inferiority of his Son Jesus Christ.**—6d.

**An Essay on the Humanity of Christ,** intended to show the consistency and utility of maintaining that our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the human race.—6d.

**An Essay on the Existence of the Devil.**—1s.

**Letters on Election.**—1s. (Glasgow, 1812.)

**The Free Grace of God defended.**—4s.

**Fifteen Discourses on Evangelical Subjects.**—8s.



**The New Testament, in an improved version.**—8vo. 16s.

—12mo. 8s.—18mo. without the preface and notes, 4s.

**CHRISTIE'S Discourses on the Divine Unity.**—4s.

**CARDALE'S True Doctrine of the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ.**

**SMITH'S Designed End of the Socinian Controversy.**—4d.

**ASPLAND'S Vindication of Unitarian Worship; a Sermon at the opening the new Meeting-house, Hackney.**—1s. 6d.

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